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Some 'Melancholy Times'

Insider's Defense of CIA

By Elmont Waite

The Central Intelligence Agency has had its "melancholy times," but still is the best organization of its kind in the world, one of its former executives, Sherman Kent, said here yesterday.

Kent, who retired in 1967 as chairman of CIA's Board of National Estimates, spoke at a luncheon meeting of the Commonwealth Club of California at the Sheraton-Palace Hotel.

Among CIA's "melancholy times," Kent listed the U-2 incident, the U.S. spy plane downed in the era of the President Eisenhower; the more recent Pueblo capture by North Koreans; and, under the late President Kennedy, the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

APPLAUSE

Still, he told his applauding audience, "I rate United States Intelligence as the best in the world."

It does this job, he said, by "keeping almost every corner of the world under constant watch," by checking radio transmissions, newspapers and other publications, by much research — and, of course, by spying.

How good a job is being done now? "The answer, from this highly prejudiced source, is a very good job. We do not know how many missiles would head for the United States from Russia if the Soviet Union's No. 1 boss pushed the red button — but we do know a lot of facts and can make an estimate. . ."

INTELLIGENCE

By the phrase "United States Intelligence," he said, he meant the joint efforts of the CIA, plus intelligence agencies of the Department of Defense, State Department, Atomic Energy Commission and the FBI —the latter limited to work within continental boundaries on reported foreign espionage here.

The total cost? "I haven't the foggiest notion."

Is the CIA better now than in its early days after World War II, or at the time of the Bay of Pigs fiasco? "The answer is an unequivocal yes."

CHANGES

The major changes, he said, have been in "the technological collection of information . . . sensitive machines. . ."

"A lot of things have changed since the Bay of Pigs," he added. But he said it was "sad to relate" that some of the changes involved putting new faces in the CIA's topmost positions — among other switches, the replacement of the former CIA chief Allen Dulles.

The Bay of Pigs invasion, Kent said, "wasn't cooked up in the CIA director's office — it followed discussions in President Kennedy's office, in many conferences."

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